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of 1913, he went to South Africa, at the invitation of the Chamber of Mines of Johannesburg, to investigate the high death rate from pneumonia among the natives working in the mines of the Rand. By applying the army methods of increasing the air space of sleeping quarters the death rate was materially lowered.

Gorgas was appointed surgeon general of the U. S. Army on January 16, 1914, and was given the rank of major general in 1915. In 1916, he spent several months in South America in making a preliminary survey of localities still infested with yellow fever, the "endemic foci" of disease, for the Rockefeller Foundation. Upon his retirement from active duty in the Army in the fall of 1918, he resumed this work and had just started upon an investigation of the African foci at the time of his death.

#### THE SUPPLY OF PLATINUM

THE *London Times* discusses the world's supply of platinum limited by the demands of war and the failure of the Russian mines. Since this metal was described and named as new in 1750 by an English physicist, Sir William Watson, its singular properties have led to a continuously increasing demand. It is slightly heavier than gold, and, like gold, is very ductile and malleable. It resists all acids except *aqua regia*, and mixtures generating chlorine. Very large quantities of it are used in modern dentistry, and during the war munition factories absorbed all that could be obtained. The jeweller prefers it to gold or silver as a setting for precious stones, and it is a component of many of the most costly examples of his art. The chemist in his laboratory requires it for ladles and beakers, for retorts and crucibles. Makers of incandescent lamps, electricians, and scien-

tific instrument makers all require it. Platinum has the curious property of absorbing large quantities of hydrogen and other gases, which in this occluded condition display a special activity. It is therefore employed in chemical industry as a catalyzer, that is to say, as an agent which excites chemical changes into which it does not itself enter. Even before the war, the relatively limited supply of the metal was unequal to the demand. The price rose rapidly. A dozen years ago platinum was 20 per cent. more valuable than gold. In 1914 it was more than twice the price of gold. In 1918 an ounce was worth five ounces of gold. After the armistice there was a slight fall, probably due to the liberation of supplies that had been withheld, but now, although gold itself has appreciated, platinum has eight times the value of gold. There is a possibility that new sources may be discovered, because it has a wide distribution usually in association with auriferous deposits. There are traces of it in the sands of the Rhine, in Lapland, Norway, and near Wicklow, in Ireland. It occurs in appreciable quantities in Honduras, Columbia, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, and British Columbia. It has been found in Borneo, Australasia, the Transvaal, Madagascar. But 90 per cent. of the world's production used to come from the Ural Mountains, where it is relatively abundant, and so easily worked that other sources have not yet been seriously exploited. In the early years of last century over a million three-rouble pieces were minted, then worth about ten shillings; now, if they could be found, worth at least £12. Efforts are being made to increase the production in Colombia; but, if Russia ever gets to work again, she will find that her platinum deposits are worth many gold-mines.